

Human Resources -- Office of Selection Services

Preparing for an Examination

As with any exam, it is important to be prepared. The more knowledge you have about the exam process as well as the classification, the better prepared you will be during the exam. Below are critical steps to assist you in preparing for an exam:

- It's never too early to start preparing. Mentoring and training should be taking place every day in the workplace. Don't wait for an exam bulletin to be advertised before you begin to prepare for your next promotional opportunity. Your interest in your job, willingness to volunteer for additional/special assignments and eagerness to learn different tasks will provide you with invaluable knowledge. The total package - education and experience - is what provides you with the expertise to respond to the job related questions that are asked during your exam.
- Read the entire exam bulletin. Pay special attention to the section titled, "Examination Plan." The section will explain what type of exam will be administered (i.e., written test, Qualification Appraisal Panel, Supplemental Application, etc.). This section will also explain the scope of the exam. The scope identifies the knowledge, skills and/or abilities required to be successful on the job. It is very important that you are familiar with the knowledge, skills and/or abilities of the classification because they are the basis for the exam questions.
- Review the Job Analysis for the classification being examined. The Office of Selection Services (OSS) conducts job analysis for every exam administered. The most critical and frequently performed tasks are identified in the job analysis in addition to the knowledge, skills and/or abilities for the classification. Job analyses can be found on the CDCR Intranet and Internet Human Resources webpage's under Career Opportunities, or a hard copy can also be obtained by visiting OSS at 1515 S Street, Room 522-North, Sacramento.
- Review and study the State Personnel Board (SPB) classification specification. This is the legal document for the classification and states how the classification is used in general, identifies the knowledge, skills and/or abilities required and lists any other pertinent classification information. The classification specification can be found on the SPB's website at www.spb.ca.gov.
- Find out where the classification is being used to broaden your understanding of the classification. Talk to an incumbent currently in the position you are examining for, request copies of duty statements, or shadow people working in the classification. Oftentimes, the individuals currently performing the duties of the classification can provide you with insight of the actual on-the-job tasks.
- Acquaint yourself with the mission and goals of CDCR, which are available on the departmental Intranet and Internet sites. Learn as much about the department and/or the various locations within the department that utilizes the classification for which you are testing. Remember, your classification may be used in other locations/units other than your own and may perform different tasks. This should provide you a more complete understanding of how the classification is used within the department and will help you formulate better job-related responses to the questions.
- Be in the role. Answer questions as if you were already in the classification or level you are testing for. Oftentimes, candidates answer questions from their current classification or level of experience. At a journey level, you may have broad technical experience, however, you will need to be prepared to answer supervisory related questions when testing for supervisory levels. For example, an Associate Governmental Program Analyst testing for a Staff Services Manager I exam should respond to the questions by explaining how you would "direct your staff" rather than actually perform the tasks yourself. A trainee classification when taking a full-journey level exam, should look at the questions and responses as being able to perform the tasks with little or no supervision – you are the expert.

There are many areas that are covered in an exam. The examination is a competitive process so while you are not expected to know everything, the more prepared you are, the more competitive you should be. Do your research and allow time for preparation. Keep your supervisor or manager in the loop – they are a valuable reference.